THE IMAGE AND INTERPRETATION OF SVATOPLUK IN THE EYES OF SLOVAK HISTORIANS OVER THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS AND ONE SHORT REMARK AT THE END

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Abstract: HOMZA, Martin. *The Image and Interpretation of Svatopluk in the Eyes of Slovak Historians Over the Last Hundred Years and One Short Remark at the End.* This brief overview clearly shows that the image and position of Svatopluk in Slovak historiography is not at all ordinary or one-dimensional. Therefore, there is no point in trying to simplify and reduce it to the mere "*ľudácky*" or "nationalistic" concept from WWII Slovakia, or to one equestrian statue at Bratislava castle. This article aims to outline the rather obvious direct proportion between the national-emancipatory and state ambitions of Slovaks and the number of historical re-examinations and updates of Svatopluk's interpretation. But more than that, it aims to highlight the universalistic character of Svatopluk. It definitely does not intend to question the internal coherence of the tradition of Slovaks as "the people of Svatopluk" Cosma of Prague writes metaphorically about in the first part of *The Nitra Legend of Svatopluk* known as *Sicut vulgo dicitur*, i.e. "As it is commonly said" at the beginning of the 12th century. After all, this legend clearly has Svatopluk not dying, but "*disappearing* amid his [Nitrian] folk."

Keywords: *Svatopluk I, St. Methodius, Viching, tradition, interpretation, the role of Svatopluk image in Slovak tradition, particularism, universalism, rex Sclavorum*

For some time now, I have been arguing with those who think that the statue of Svatopluk at Bratislava castle should bear the notice SVATOPLUK, KING OF THE EARLY SLOVAKS. Some time ago – a few years after the statue was unveiled in 2010, but before the infamous commission headed by Marína Zavacká made a final decision on whether it should be erected at Bratislava castle at all – I proposed that the notice on the pedestal should read nothing more and nothing less than the mere Latin words: SVENTIBALD REX SCLAVORUM. For these are the very words Pope Stephen V used to address Svatopluk in his famous letter from September 885 (Homza 2013a, 655-669). With hindsight, I now realize I should have explained my point in more detail as, on that occasion, I focused on arguing for Svatopluk's royal title.

For this reason, let me go back to the explanation I owe not only to my opponents, but also to the Slovak public in general. Those who support the original inscription on the statue of Svatopluk – and me as well – base their opinions on arguments, of course. The strongest part of my opponents' defense is deeply rooted in the historical tradition of Slovakia. Let me try to summarize this tradition in a brief but, hopefully, representative overview. Not a full recapitulation, just a representative one. I hope I can manage to select the most relevant of their arguments. This means I will not approach all the numerous aspects concerning Svatopluk Slovak historians have dealt with so far, just those relevant for the purpose of this dispute.

Slovak historiography clearly formulated the historical tradition of Svatopluk as king of the Slovaks in the late 17th century (Labancová 2013, 337-371; Pilingová 2013, 371-406). In literature,

it concentrated and indelibly made it to the school textbooks in the form of the literary stereotype of Svatopluk as King of the Slovaks that Ján Hollý († 1849) depicts in his hitherto unsurpassed epic entitled *Svatopluk*, which was first published in 1833 (Hollý 1999, 178-555).

The *Všeslavia* generation also made a significant step towards understanding Svatopluk, the (Moravian-)Slovak king. Above all by historiographer Pavol Jozef Šafárik († 1861) and literary essayist Ján Kollár († 1852) (Podolan 2013, 407-520). Pavol Jozef Šafárik – the founder of modern Slavonic studies – dealt with Svatopluk in a rather innovative way for his time. In his works *History of Slavic Speech and Literature of All Dialects* (Schaffarik1826 and Šafárik 1963) and *Slavic Antiquities* (Šafarjk 1837), he practically exhausted all available sources on the topic. In fact, we owe Šafárik the hitherto most comprehensive historical-critical overview of Svatopluk's entire political career. Since he understood Svatopluk's *regnum* to be Moravia, he added Moravia in the territory of present-day Slovakia and Moravia in Transdanubia to Moravia proper. Šafárik found the basis for this in the well-established interpretation of the history of Great Moravia, e.g. in Ján Tomka-Sásky's 1751 historical-geographical work *Introduction to the Ancient and Medieval Geography of Hungary* (*Parvus atlas Hungariae*), (Szászki 1781) which was teaching material at Slovak lyceum schools. However, Šafárik considered the population of Moravia as being primarily Slovak. In his *Slavic Antiquities* (Okr. II. Art. IX "O Morawanech a Slowacjích"/ "On Moravians and Slovaks") he, therefore, conceptually put together old Moravia and the whole of Slovakia – including the Slovaks – in one Moravian-Slovak section. It needs to be emphasized that the Czech section constituted a separate part of the *Slavic Antiquities*. According to the founder of Slavic studies, the Moravians in southeastern Moravia went by the same name as the Slovaks: "*The name, dialect, physical and moral nature of the Slovaks in the Hungarian Kingdom,* [...] *from times immemorial have been closest to their brothers the Moravians, whose southeast half, which spreads from the confluence of the Thaya and the Morava up to the Wallachs, goes by the name of Slovaks up to this day.*" / "*Gméno, nárečj, tělesná i mrawní powaha uherskských Slowakůw*, [...] *od nepamětných časůw neyaužegi/najtesnejšie ge spogowal s bratry gegich Morawany, kterýchžto gihowýchodní polowice, od stoku Dyge* [Dyje] *s Morawou až k Walachům se táhnoucj, až do dnes gméno Slowakůw sobě přikládá.*" This way, brilliant Šafárik laid the dividing line between Czech and Slovak dialects somewhere in the middle of the contemporary historical land of Moravia. He was not the only one to share this opinion in Czech and Slovak linguistics (Doruľa 2016, 20-21). In Slovak historiography, Šafárik's views became the starting point for many other Slovak historians, indeed.

In Czech historiography, however, František Palacký's († 1876) *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia* – which already has Czechs and Moravians being one single nation – overlaid Šafárik's concept of one Slovakia-Moravia. Palacký's work first appeared in German in 1836 and was followed by a Czech revised edition in 1848. In order to give his new concept some historical and legal support, Palacký had Svatopluk marry the sister of Czech prince Borivoj in 871. Subsequently: "[...] *since that time* [the Czechs] *have united their weapons with the Moravians against their common enemies*" (Palacký 1848, 150). This, however, is nothing by Palacký's conjecture for there are absolutely no sources to support such a claim. Despite this, Palacký – who by the way studied in the Slovak cities of Trenčín and Bratislava – managed to conceptually influence not only Czech, but also part of Slovak historiography.

As far as the overall perception of Svatopluk I is concerned, no significant discrepancies can be found between Šafárik and Palacký. Šafárik just laid a bit more emphasis on Nitra being the original *regnum* of Svatopluk I at different points. As for Svatopluk's rank as a ruler, Šafárik calls him *rex* (king) adhering to the sources. However, he mostly refers to him as "Grand Prince." Interestingly, Šafárik – an evangelical – paid very little attention to Svatopluk's papal policy, but – like Ján Hollý and Ján Kollár – did not fail to emphasize every anti-German aspect of his policy.

Most 19th century *Matica slovenská* historians also contributed to embedding the image of Svatopluk as the first king of Slovaks in the historical awareness of the Slovak people. Worth mentioning are Jonáš Záborský and Frank Víťazoslav Sasinek. In their work, both historians dealt intensively with the Great Moravian period. In line with the hitherto Slovak historiographical tradition, they considered it to be the basis of historicism of Slovaks. The elder of them, Jonáš Záborský († 1876) (Marsina 2012 a, 185-187), was an extraordinarily educated and prolific author. Inexplicably, his key work on Slovak history, the *History of the Kingdom of Hungary from its Beginnings to the Time of Sigismund*, had to wait until 2010 to be published in its entirety (Záborský 2010, 24-42). Some of Záborský's key articles were published during his lifetime, though (Záborský 1873, 16-41; Záborský 1929, 15). Like Šafárik, Záborský did not hesitate to call Svatopluk's *regnum* "Moravia." Nevertheless, he did clearly point out that the population of this political unit called itself Slavs: "*They were all together Moravians and Slavs. The name Slavs belonged to them as a nation; the name Moravians as members of the Moravian empire...* [...] *At least that was the way the Germans understood it.*" This way he ascribed Svatopluk and the history of Great Moravia to the Slavs, i.e. to the Slovaks. On the other hand, Záborský also noticed the dual character of the Moravia-Nitra relationship, to which he refers using an expression that cannot be found anywhere else in the sources: "*the Principality of the Váh River Valley*" (*Kniežatstvo povážske*). Záborský compared the relationship between Nitra and Moravia proper to the relationship between contemporary Poland to Russia, namely as "*a never ending and incurable ulcer that torments the body.*" / "*večný nezahojiteľný vred na tele*". According to Záborský, Svatopluk began his political career precisely in the Principality of Nitra when he betrayed his uncle Rastislav. Záborský's overall assessment of Svatopluk I is, however, contradictory. On the one hand, he celebrates his role in creating the Slavic confederation in the mid-Danube region. On the other hand, he criticizes his pro-Empire policy and sees it as naive. Neither did Záborský ever manage to come to terms with Svatopluk's ecclesiastical policy oriented towards Rome and the Latin world.

Franko Víťazoslav Sasinek († 1914) was another younger historian of the *Matica slovenská* period (Hollý 2010, 145-163). Like Záborský, Sasinek was a very prolific author who dealt with Svatopluk I in his synthesizing works on the beginnings of the Kingdom of Hungary, namely the *History of the Ancient Nations in the Territory of the Present-Day Kingdom of Hungary* (Sasinek 1867, 164-173) and *the Great Moravian Empire* (Sasinek 1896, 10 onwards). Sasinek's works show some shift in their understanding of Svatopluk – against Záborský and Šafárik. This shift can be seen in the way he approaches the history of Great Moravia as such. Unlike Šafárik, Záborský and other Czech and Moravian historians, in the history of this territory Sasinek sees the history "*of three Slavic branches, the Moravians in present-day Moravia, Slovaks in the northwestern part of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Slavs on the west bank of the Danube... [...] The lands they occupied, on both banks of the Danube, had one common name: Slovakia (Sclavinia) and Great Moravia (Moravia Magna).*" / "*troch slovanských vetví, Moravanov v terajšej Morave, Slovákov v severo-západnom Uhorsku a Slovanov na západnom brehu Dunaja... [...] Krajiny od nich zaujaté, na oboch brehoch Dunaja ležiace, maly nekdy jedno spoločné meno: Slovensko (Sclavinia) a Veľká Morava (Moravia Magna)*".

When defining the Nitra Slavs, however, he elaborates on this statement: "*[...] here we perceive part of the Moravians as Slavs of Nitra.*" / "*[...] časť Moravanov bereme tuná pod názvom Slovanov nitrianskych.*" In his later work, *The Great Moravian Empire*, Sasinek dated Svatopluk's accession to the throne of Nitra to have happened in 846. In fact, he does have some legitimate reasons to do so. This was to happen in connection with the great "castling" Louis the German made among his Slavic subordinates between the Elbe and the Sava rivers after becoming King of East Franconia. As it is known, the King of the East Frankish Kingdom then replaced

Mojmir I with Rastislav, but gave Pannonia to Pribina as hereditary property, a move intended to keep Rastislav in check. On that very occasion, Svatopluk might have been given the Principality of Nitra. Sasinek's reasoning is based, among other things, on the fact that Svatopluk made peace with Carloman in 869 without his uncle Rastislav being aware of it, something he would not have been able to do had he been appointed to Nitra as one of Rastislav's vassals. In contrast to Záborský and Šafárik, Sasinek clearly defines the original *regnum* of Svatopluk I to be the Principality of Nitra.

Earlier opinions supporting the idea of Svatopluk as the king of the (early) Slovaks also found breeding ground after the establishment of the first Czech-Slovak Republic. They were the reaction to Bratislava's attempts to impose a new etatistic perception to the history of Czechoslovakia. (Vass 2011, passim; Ducháček 2014, passim). This purely political task was assigned to Václav Chaloupecký († 1951) (Chaloupecký 1922, 1-30) especially to his foremost work *The Idea of a Czechoslovak State* (Chaloupecký 1936). He introduced some major arguments supporting this new historical concept already in his most famous work, *Ancient Slovakia* (*Staré Slovensko*), which was published in Bratislava in 1923 (Chaloupecký 1923). Václav Chaloupecký was a disciple of Josef Pekař († 1937) and his admiration for František Palacký was well known, too. Equally well known is the fact that Chaloupecký worked not only in the Czech lands, but was also a professor at the newly created Department of State – i.e. Czechoslovak – History at Comenius University in Slovakia's capital. Although Chaloupecký worked for over 15 years in Bratislava (1922-1938), he never stopped looking at the history of Slovakia and its inhabitants from a Czech perspective. Among other things, this reflected in his underestimating the importance Nitra and the Principality of Nitra played in Svatopluk's career. Like several other colleagues of his, Chaloupecký supported Czech linguist František Pastrnek's thesis according to which – from a linguistic point of view – Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks form one single nation. Chaloupecký endorsed this "linguistic argument" about the unity of Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks adding an "ethnographic" aspect. However, a large part of the population of present-day Slovakia living south of the Carpathians, who referred to themselves as Slovaks, especially from the central and eastern part of the country, does not really fit this concept. As a matter of fact, they show neither linguistic or any ethnographic relation with the Moravians, let alone with the Czechs. To help himself, Chaloupecký needed to elaborate on his "ethnographic" update. In practice, this meant emphasizing anything that could be put in relation to the Czechs. And so he was left with roughly the western part of Slovakia. In the end, he was forced to "squeeze" the easternmost border of the Principality of Nitra – which he otherwise recognized as the core of Svatopluk's *regnum* – to the Hron river. Also this time, he found "historical" arguments to support this claim. As a matter of fact, he simply borrowed the political thesis the first chronicler of the Czechs, Cosmas of Prague, had tailored for the Premyslids. According to Chaloupecký – from an ethnographic point of view, as well as in terms of its settlement and linguistic character – western Slovakia belonged to the Western Slavs and, therefore, "to the group of Czech tribes." This way, he made of Svatopluk I – in principle – a Czech ruler.

As already mentioned, these and other theses from Chaloupecký's most famous work, *Ancient Slovakia*, have long been known. However, this work was not only meant to use the prism of history to argue for the period political dominance of the Czechs in the area east of the Morava River, but also to legitimize it historically and legally. In his work, Chaloupecký endorsed the delimitation of the Slovak territory (country), mainly against any possible post-Trianon historical and political revisionist attempts by the Magyars. For this reason, it was imperative for him to deal with the place Svatopluk occupies in the history of the Principality of Nitra as a historical and political entity. This task, however, collided with his notoriously irrational and condescending attitude towards any part of history that could not be labelled as Czech. In fact, the establishment of Czechoslovakia made it necessary to give everything possible a Czech – Czechoslovak – character.

This is obvious from the deriding 1745 quote by Slovak Lutheran priest Matej Markovič, which Chaloupecký included in *Ancient Slovakia* to describe the beginnings of the Slovak tradition of Svatopluk: / "*And so it happened that those petty Slovaks finally got their hands on a Slovak king in a Slovak Country.*" / "*Tak se Slováčkovia slovenského krále jednou též dožili v Slovenské krajině.*" The fact that Chaloupecký placed this quote right onto the first page of his work testifies to his purpose (Chaloupecký 1923, 10-11). Although Chaloupecký did not question Svatopluk's royal rank – in line with the hitherto Czech historiography – he refused to refer to him by the expression Slovak historiography had commonly used so far, i.e. King of Slovaks, and opted to call him "King of the Moravians" instead (Chaloupecký 1934, 61-68). Among other things, with this designation he deprived the Slovaks of their historicity.

Despite its indisputable high scholarly quality, Chaloupecký's interpretation of the earliest history of Slovakia – i.e. but not of Slovaks! – caused resentment among Slovak scholars and students at the historical departments at Comenius University, whose understanding of Slovak history had been built on their first-hand perception of the over two-hundred-year tradition of Slovak historiography. Therefore, the community of Slovak scholars and students did not quite agree with Chaloupecký's statist approach to the history of Slovakia and Slovaks. Daniel Rapant († 1988) – the first one to call for a distinct Slovak history (Marsina, 1998, passim) and the most important Slovak historian of the 20th century – strongly disagreed with Chaloupecký's claims in his works (Rapant 1967, 28-38; (Ducháček 2011, 78-97).

However, Rapant was not the only one to challenge Chaloupecký's idea of a "Czechoslovak" history. Of course, for those disputing this view it was imperative to re-examine the historical figure of Svatopluk I once again. The most ferocious opponent to Chaloupecký's theses was František Hrušovský († 1956). The second Slovak professor of history at the Slovak University (today Comenius University again) in Bratislava after Daniel Rapant (Polla, 1994, 238-241) directly and indirectly dealt with Svatopluk in several works. Firstly, in his wider study *Great Moravia and Poland* (Hrušovský 1935, 289-317), which was published in the memorable proceedings *The Great Moravian Empire* in 1935. In 1939, he published *Slovak History* in *Matica slovenská* (Hrušovský 1939, 46-51). Even after going into exile, Hrušovský continued dealing with Svatopluk in several more or less scholarly-popularizing works (Hrušovský 1942, 23-26; Hrušovský, 1948, 173-225).

When looking at Svatopluk, Hrušovský primarily focused on his aggressive military policy, though. The image he created of Svatopluk was that of a ruthless and immoral yet pragmatic leader and conqueror who had no consideration for the cultural legacy of St. Methodius and his disciples. However, Hrušovský still considered Svatopluk to be the first Slovak king, an opinion he believed to be true until the end of his life. Today, Hrušovský's historical work is assessed in many different ways. Among other things, he is labeled as the "court historian of the Slovak State" (Lysý 2013, 24-33). However, those who use that label seem to ignore the strong anti-German tone of his works, precisely in regard to Svatopluk. The time in which Hrušovský – a historian and politician – wrote, directly demanded greater emphasis on Svatopluk's pro-Imperial orientation.

This makes it necessary to say that at the end of the 1930s, Hrušovský's work contributed to the figure of Svatopluk becoming not only a token of the struggle of Slovaks for autonomy, but also a growing symbolic figure. The interpretations of the historical figure of Svatopluk were not only a reaction to the frustration caused by the discontent with the idea of a common "Czechoslovak nation" that was being imposed from above, but also reflected the growing aspirations of Slovaks for autonomy and an independent Slovakia.

With the establishment of the Slovak State on 14 March 1939 and of the Slovak Republic on 21 July 1939, the Svatopluk era became a key factor in the efforts to historically legitimize the new polity. The work *The Idea of Svatopluk's Crown* by Štefan Polakovič († 1999) (Letz 2000,

442-446) aimed to grant this pragmatic task a "scholarly hallmark." It was published in 1940 in *Slovenské pohľady* magazine (Polakovič 1940, 341-352). The young Slovak Republic had to obtain its historical and legal justification by means of Svatopluk. In this respect, philosopher Polakovič paid little attention to analyzing historical sources in his work and, instead, gave Svatopluk both a national and a Christian character. For this reason, Polakovič tried to wipe out any incongruities between Svatopluk and the Cyril and Methodius tradition of Slovaks. Among Slovaks, moreover, the "Idea of Svatopluk" completely replaced the "Idea of St. Stephen" Slovaks had adhered to for centuries before the Hungarian kings – i.e. kings of the Kingdom of Hungary – were turned into "Magyar" kings. By means of this newly created "Idea of Svatopluk", Polakovič also rejected the "Idea of Wenceslas" of the Czechs. A comparative advantage of the "Idea of Svatopluk" in this respect was the fact that it originated earlier. This way Polakovič made Slovaks the oldest nation in Central Europe.

Lamentably, by putting the rule of Svatopluk I and its timeless legacy in connection with the first Slovak Republic, Polakovič turned this historical issue into an ordinary political instrument. Whatever his originally well intended purpose might have been, in the end it only harmed the study of Svatopluk in Slovakia. In fact, he actually created the "short link" between the figure of Svatopluk I and the first Slovak Republic that up to this day burdens any positive interpretation of the most important member of the Mojmirid lineage by the Slovak historians (Lysý 2015, 333-345). On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize and point out that in some of his formulations, Polakovič did hit the nail on the head. For example, when he considered the problem of integrating Svatopluk into Czech history. According to him, Czech historians: "[...] *have never accepted* [Svatopluk] *in their history because he has always been an alien for them and, therefore, has never enjoyed any special popularity in Czech historiography either.*" / "[...] *nepočítali do svojich dejín, lebo to bol pre nich vždy cudzinec, a preto ani u českej historiografie nenašiel zvláštnej obľuby*".

The connection between Svatopluk's kingdom of the (early) Slovaks and WWII Slovakia did not remain unnoticed in post-war Slovak historiography. Already in 1945, the articles by literary critic and historian Michal Chorvát († 1982) in the *Nové Slovo* weekly foreshadowed a sharp change in the perception of Svatopluk (Chorvát 1945, 5-8). His critique of Svatopluk was essentially a critique of the previous "*ľudácky*" [connected with the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party / Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana] – i.e. nationalistic – notion of this figure. Therefore, Chorvát saw in Rastislav a better suited historical model for the new socialist conditions than in Svatopluk. As a matter of fact, Chorvát depicted Svatopluk as a kind pro-German collaborator. The reason why Rastislav fit the new communist ideology better was his alleged inclination towards Byzantium, which Chorvát understood as an inclination eastwards, an association fallacy meaning Soviet-oriented. As a result, the communist regime in Czechoslovakia highlighted Rastislav and played down Svatopluk.

The efforts to purge Slovakia's political and cultural life of Slovak clericalism and nationalism did not end here, though. After the country's Catholics, any intellectual showing the slightest sign of pro-Slovak orientation followed. In fact, 1950 marked the beginning of a series of trials against the "bourgeois nationalists." It was precisely at that time that Ján Dekan († 2007), later the founder of the Archaeological Institute at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, university teacher and academic of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and a long-term dean of the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University, published in 1951 study on Svatopluk – as a kind of postscript to the previous time and a promise of a new era. This work would eventually become the canon of Marxist historiography. Dekan called it *Slovak History: The Beginnings of Slovak History and the Great Moravian Empire* (Dekan 1951, 113-153). However, when dealing with the Great Moravian period and the rule of Svatopluk, Dekan strictly avoided referring to him as "Slovak" in his work. Instead, he preferred the term "Moravian-Slavic." This way, Dekan rejected Chaloupecký's thesis

concerning the Czech character of the western part of 9th century Moravia and western Slovakia up to the Hron River. However, he also called into question Šafárik's model – preferred by Slovak historiography – which has the transitional "Moravian-Slovak" dialects in southwestern Moravia in the category of Slovak dialects. He argued that this population did not arrive in the area until after the fall of Great Moravia in the 10th century and especially during the 13th century colonization period.

Dekan's picture of Svatopluk remained the most complex in Slovak historiography for a long time. In line with the hitherto Slovak historiography, he considered Svatopluk to be an appanage prince of Nitra and understood the ties between Moravia and Nitra to be nothing but the "regular" relationship between two principalities that are independent from one another. Unlike older and contemporary Czech-Moravian historians, Dekan acknowledged the "*political-administrative dualism*" of the relations between Nitra and Moravia throughout the whole duration of Great Moravia. In line with the demands of his time, Dekan also condemned Svatopluk's ecclesiastical policy, in which he saw a model of reactionary Catholic clericalism. As a matter of fact, he wrote: "*If we are to refer to the progressive elements of our history and build the future of our nation on them, we will certainly not build them on the backward and collaborative tradition of Svatopluk, but rather on the heroic, as well as socially and culturally progressive traditions of Rastislav and the legacy of Cyril and Methodius.*" / "*Ak sa máme odvolávať na pokrokové prvky našich dejín a na nich budovať budúcnosť nášho ľudu, rozhodne nebudeme stavať na spiatočníckej a kolaborantskej tradícii svätoplukovskej, ale na hrdinnej a spoločensky i kultúrne pokrokovej tradícii rastislavovskej a cyrilometodskej*" (Dekan 1951, 182-183). These lines clearly show that while Ján Dekan did create the most complete picture of Svatopluk I of his time, the image he produced of this ruler was a rather dark one, certainly the result of the ideological ballast of his time. The most important feature of Dekan's work, however, is the fact that it practically became the "last word" concerning Svatopluk in Slovak historiography for years to come. Due to the increasingly strong Czechoslovakism – which was now disguised in the guards of proletarian internationalism and the infallible Marxist-Leninist dialectics of class struggle (Kamenec – K. Zavacká 1984, passim) – Svatopluk became a political taboo in Slovak history and in Slovakia for over two decades.

What was valid on one side of the Iron Curtain did not quite apply on the other one, though. As a matter of fact, the Slovak émigrés also managed to produce their own historians abroad. One of the most important of them is Milan Stanislav Ďurica, the ideological successor of František Hrušovský and Štefan Polakovič's Catholic line of 20th century Slovak historiography. Ďurica tried to break the "traditionalist" understanding of Great Moravia as the first common "polity" of Czechs (Moravians) and Slovaks. His speech on the topic *Slovak Nationalism in the Frame of European Development* became well known after it was presented in 1976 in Switzerland at a conference organized by the "Czechoslovak Society for Science and the Arts." The topic of the conference was "The Philosophy of Czech and Slovak History" (Rydlo 2019, 46-47). In connection with Svatopluk, Ďurica came up with the radical and provocative idea of a Slovak monarch who annexed Bohemia after 890. In his opinion, the Czechs would never forgive Svatopluk and so, they actively contributed to the fall of Great Moravia after his death. In his works, Ďurica does not question Nitra being the starting point in Svatopluk's career. He also considers Svatopluk to be the king of the early Slovaks. However, he sees the population on both banks of the Morava River to be Slovaks. Ďurica understands the Moravians themselves to be a political representation of Slovaks, and Moravia as a polity of early Slovaks. He especially highlights Svatopluk's contribution to the development of the Moravian-Pannonian Church. He did not fail to notice Svatopluk's above-standard relations with the Holy See and, based on the way the Pope addresses Svatopluk – *unicus filius* – he follows the line of František (Francis) Dvorník and presents his hypothesis that

St. Peter's successors in Rome were considering Svatopluk as a potential candidate for the imperial throne (Ďurica 2019, 107-143).

Coincidentally, the silence Slovak Marxist medievalism kept about Svatopluk also ended definitively in the mid-1970s, more exactly in 1977. That year, Matúš Kučera published his article *On the Historical Awareness of Slovaks in the Middle Ages* in the *Historický časopis* magazine (Kučera 1977, 217-238). Analyzing medieval narratives – not only – from the Kingdom of Hungary, Kučera proved beyond doubt that the Svatopluk tradition has been the only continuous and, therefore, constructive tradition of the Slovak people since the Middle Ages. After dealing with Svatopluk in a strictly scholarly way, Kučera started to popularize this topic in the mid-1980s, more exactly with his work *Figures of Great Moravian History* (Kučera 2005, 220 onwards). After the establishment of the second Slovak Republic in 1993, Kučera – this time a politician – went back to Svatopluk – like Štefan Polakovič had done before him – looking for historical support for the new republic precisely in the most famous episode of Slovak history, i.e. the reign of King Svatopluk. It was on the occasion of the erection of the statue of Svatopluk at Bratislava Castle in 2010 that his popularizing book *King Svatopluk* (830? – 846 – 894) was published (Kučera, 2010). However, Kučera was not the only medievalist who dared deal with Svatopluk in the last years of the socialist era. Another one was Peter Ratkoš († 1987). Ratkoš had already approached Great Moravia – with extreme caution – in the early 1960s, i.e. during the Bratislava Early Spring, which brought about a new and strong Slovak national-emancipatory ethos and a revived interest in the earliest history of Slovaks (Ratkoš 1966, 7-40). Like other Slovak historians, Ratkoš was very cautious when dealing with Svatopluk since he was well aware of the "Damocles' sword of bourgeois nationalism" that hung over those who "played" with this issue. No wonder, then, that Ratkoš's works comply with the Marxist-Leninist spirit of history and do not question the traditionalist interpretation of Great Moravia as the first common polity of Czechs and Slovaks (Kartous 2011, 222-224). In 1965, he also published the *Sources to the History of Great Moravia* (Ratkoš 1968), i.e. translations of many of the most important sources on Great Moravia. This collection of historical sources brought Svatopluk closer to the general public. Ratkoš's work *Slovakia in the Period of Great Moravia* was published posthumously in 1988 (Ratkoš 1988, 107-119). In it, Ratkoš also unequivocally recognizes the royal rank of Svatopluk as well as his close connection to Nitra. However – due to the fact that this monograph was published one year before the Gentle Revolution – he did not dare use the adjective "Slovak" (banned since the time of Ján Dekan) for Svatopluk *expressis verbis*. Similar to Kučera in the 1970s and 1980s, Ratkoš's legible pro-Czech tone can be perceived when describing Svatopluk's deeds. However, his anti-German – i.e. anti-imperialist/anti-capitalistic – thorn is also conspicuous. As for the dispute between Svatopluk and the disciples of St. Methodius, Ratkoš takes the side of the Old Slavic Church. He also tactfully circumvented the pro-Roman orientation of Svatopluk's policy.

The next name in the list of the greatest Slovak medievalists in the recent past is that of Richard Marsina. In the year of the 1100th anniversary of the death of Svatopluk I, i.e. in the second year of existence of the second Slovak Republic, Marsina was at the backstage of an international interdisciplinary conference aimed at trying to bring Svatopluk and his era closer to today's public (Marsina – Ruttkay, A. (ed.), 1994). Later, he also engaged in the struggle for a Slovak interpretation of Svatopluk in several of his works. The most important is perhaps his monograph *The Struggle of Methodius* (Marsina 2012b, 104-126).

In the meantime, Czech historiography kept undermining Svatopluk's title "king" and increasingly derided the expression "early Slovaks." In this respect, Marsina wrote: "*The title the papal documents use to address Svatopluk had a rising tendency in terms of weight* / "*v pápežských písomnostiach malo titulovanie Svätopluka hodnotovo vzostupnú tendenciu.*" Elsewhere he added: "*Linguistic, ethnographic and historical literature give testimony of the original ethnographic*

affiliation of a large part of the population of today's Moravia to the Slovak ethnic group. Therefore, calling Svatopluk king of the early Slovaks can by no means be considered inappropriate." / "*O pôvodnej etnografickej príslušnosti veľkej časti obyvateľstva dnešnej Moravy k slovenskému etniku svedčí lingvistická, etnografická a historická literatúra. Teda ani formuláciu, že Svätopluk bol kráľom starých Slovákov, nemožno pokladať za nenáležitú*" (Marsina 2011, 72-86).

Marsina understands Svatopluk as forming integral part of the Nitra tradition. In this respect, his opinion clearly represents the unanimity of the older part of contemporary Slovak medievalists on Svatopluk. The Svatopluk tradition among Slovaks does not lack historical continuity and really constitutes the only long-term historical tradition of Slovaks. It is, therefore, surprising – to say the least – that some Slovak historians have now taken a challenging attitude in this respect. As a matter of fact, this tradition served to set Slovaks apart from the Magyars even within the Kingdom of Hungary. Later – in the times of Czech and communist ideological oppression – it would again play the same role. In both these periods the Svatopluk tradition was also revised and updated, an important element in the complex development that finally led to Slovakia becoming an independent country in the 20th century (Marsina 2014, 17-30).

In 1990, Ján Steinhübel concurs with the historical tradition of Svatopluk in his article *The Great Moravian Historical Tradition of the Transdanubian Slovaks* (Steinhübel 1990, 693-705). In 2004, he still stuck to the traditional interpretation of Svatopluk in his publication *The Principality of Nitra* (Steinhübel 2004, 165-186). It is necessary to point out that in this monograph, Steinhübel returned to the historical continuity of the Principality of Nitra within the Kingdom of Hungary in the same tone the *Matica Slovenská* historians had written in the nineteenth-century. As for his assessment of Svatopluk in this work, Steinhübel has not yet overcome the established interpretation of Svatopluk in Slovak historiography. He unequivocally acknowledges the role of Nitra in his deeds and, *de facto,* his royal rank (Steinhübel 2010b, 29-34). Curiously, he does not consider it important to talk about recognising it *de jure*.

The turnabout in this respect came a little later and was certainly the result not only of the influence of current Czech historiography (mostly Dušan Třeštík), but mainly to oblige with a political request and – last but not least – to please the new lords of Slovakia: the media. Steinhübel is perhaps the first medievalist in Slovak historiography to question the royal title of Svatopluk I in his work *Was Svatopluk the King of the Early Slovaks? The Inscription on the Pedestal of Svatopluk's Statue*, an article commissioned by the then Speaker of the Slovak National Council, Richard Sulík (Steinhübel 2010a, 9 pp).

His testimony provoked a sharp controversy among Slovak medievalists (Uličný 2011, 39-50; Bartl 2014, 325-334; Lysý 2014, 325-334; Marsina 2014, 17-30, etc.). I was one of those who reacted to that article (Homza 2013a, 655-669; Homza 2016b, 139-163; Homza 2016a 160-187). In 2013, I prepared and published a collection of articles on Svatopluk entitled *Svatopluk in European Writings*. More than dealing with Svatopluk as a historical figure, however, the team of authors focused on the origin and development of the Svatoplukian memory – *Legend of Svatopluk*. This expression refers to a set of narrative and pictorial sources that look at Svatopluk I retrospectively, all of them following a specific purpose. In my work as a historian, I have never stopped trying to make the general public familiar with the variable character and the numerous revisions and updates of the *Legend of Svatopluk* in the different periods (Homza 2015, 25-36; Homza 2016c, 109-120; Homza 2020, 42-67; Homza 2021a, 8-39, Homza 2021b, 79-104).

The way the image and interpretation of Svatopluk has developed in Slovak historiography shows some specific features that differentiate the way Slovaks perceive Svatopluk from the way other East-Central national historiographies look at him. They can be summarized in a few points:

1. Svatopluk began his political career in Nitra and Nitra was his capital.
2. The population of Nitra, Moravia and Transdanubia was the same. They called themselves Slavs – *Slověni* – and were the ancestors of present-day Slovaks.
3. In the mid-980s at the latest, Svatopluk became one of the sovereign Christian rulers of Europe. This reflects in his title, *Rex Sclavorum*, i.e. the "King of the Slavs / Slovaks," the same title Pope Stephen V uses to address him in his letter from 885.

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Up to this point I identify with the arguments of that group of Slovak medievalists. So, in what respect is my understanding of the title *rex Sclavorum* different? Should the title *Rex Sclavorum* be understood as "King of the Slovaks"? I think so, but not exclusively.

To explain this subtle but substantial difference, let me start with an essay by the now almost forgotten Slovak thinker Quido Matejko († 1997). Matejko produced the most comprehensive interpretation of Svatopluk I in his article *The Political Thinking of Slovaks in the Middle Ages*. It was first published in *Slovenské pohľady* magazine in 1944 and a little later as a separate brochure (Matejko 1944, 4-46). Like Polakovič before him, Matejko also approached Svatopluk from a quite different perspective and did not limit himself to strictly focusing on the historical deeds of this ruler. Instead, he approached Svatopluk's rule in a rather abstract way. This made his formulations timeless, undoubtedly their biggest value. Matejko's core idea is that the political and historical development of the whole Central and East-Central Europe – and, therefore, of Slovakia and Slovaks as well – need to be understood as the result of the constant conflict between a set of particularities and a universal. Matejko describes the 9th century Slovak particularity as having three different aspects: a cultural-linguistic, a political and an ecclesiastical aspect. This multi-dimensional particularity stands in opposition to the imperial and the papal (Roman) universals. For Matejko, the cultural-linguistic aspect of the Slovak particularity is the Cyril and Methodius legacy, its political particularity is the Principality of Nitra, and its ecclesiastical particularity is the Nitra Diocese. In contrast, the imperial universal is Charlemagne's political concept of *Renovatio imperii Romanorum*, i.e. the restoration of the Roman Empire. However, this essentially political program was to be carried out in conformity with the spiritual power in the form of an *Imperium Christianum*. The Papal universal is, in turn, the vigorous policies carried out by Pope Nicholas I (858 – 867) and his successors Hadrian II (867 – 872) and John VIII (872 – 882). For it was during their pontificates that the thesis of the primacy of the spiritual power over the secular one began to take clear shape within the church.

Matejko considered Svatopluk's policy and, therefore, the whole political thinking of Slovaks in the Middle Ages to have a universalist character. In fact, he placed Svatopluk's universal against all Slovak particularities of the time, as well as against any future cultural, ecclesiastical and political particularities in Central Europe. How did Matejko get such a visible and clear definition, to what extent this judgement by a young scholar – he was not thirty at the time – is a matter of intuition, enlightenment, or deep scholarly analysis is beyond my knowledge.[1] He, however, seems to have captured the very essence of Svatopluk's policy, namely to create a strong Christian monarchy in the northeastern part of former *Illyricum*, which would be called Kingdom of Slavs – *Regnum Sclavorum* – after the common collective name of the dominant part of its population. This kingdom would then become an integral part of Charlemagne's *Imperium Christianum*. The ecclesiastical sovereignty of the Kingdom of the Slavs was to be guaranteed by the Petrine See in Rome. Matejko explained the Kingdom of the Slavs' political independence from the Empire as being the merit of Svatopluk's clever policy, formally based on the principle of loyalty to his

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[1] Quido Matejko as an obliterated thinker would deserve scholarly research.

Christian sovereign, the emperor. In reality, however, Svatopluk was to achieve it by means of his invincible army.

Let me – over seven decades later – elaborate on Matejko's thesis. I completely identify with Matejko's idea – shared by other Slovak thinkers – that for Svatopluk to be able to meet these goals, he first needed to ensure the independence of the ecclesiastical structure of his kingdom. Together with Boris from Bulgaria, Rastislav from Moravia, Koceľ from Pannonia, Branimír from Croatia, and Mutimír from Serbia, also Svatopluk from Nitra belonged to those Slavic rulers of the former Roman *Illyricum* and adjacent areas who were interested in restoring the Pope's ecclesiastical supremacy over this province (Dvorník 1935, 162-225; Betti, 2013, passim). Svatopluk might not have done as much to reestablish the Archdiocese of Pannonia as Koceľ did, but it was him who, in the end, benefited the most from it. Indeed, after 873 Svatopluk became the pope's commissioned political protector of Rome's (old-)new ecclesiastical project. The project intended to extend Rome's political influence to the territories with a predominant Slav population would go by different names in papal politics. First by Church of Illyricum, later by Church of Pannonia and, after 880, by Church of Moravia. Nevertheless, I dare say that in the end it became the Church of Sclavonia, albeit its liturgy and language were Latin.[2]

I agree with my predecessors in claiming that the milestone for the constitution of this Slavic ecclesiastical province – although still called Holy Church of Moravia – was the year 880. For it was then that Pope John VIII († 882) – by means of the bulla *Industriae tuae* – took Svatopluk and his *regnum* under the direct protection and patronage of the Holy See. And he promoted Svatopluk to the same level as the rest of Christian rulers of Latin Europe. The document is paramount, so let me present its introductory part:

"*... We have come to know the sincerity of Your* [Svatopluk's] *devotion and the desire of all Your people, which you hold towards the Apostolic See and our fatherly care* [John VIII's]. *Because by the grace of God you have despised other rulers of this world, out of your most faithful love and together with your noble faithful men and all the people of your empire, you have chosen Saint Peter, prince of the apostolic church and its deputy, to be your patron, assistant and protector in all, and bend your head to his and his deputy's protection, with your pious mind and the help of God you yearned to remain his most devoted son until your end. And for this strong faith and devotion of Yours and Your people, the Apostolic See with open arms embraces you with immense love as our only son and together with all those loyal to you, we take you into our fatherly womb as sheep of the Lord that have been entrusted to us ...* "[3]

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[2] This argument is supported by the fact that when Viching was appointed bishop of Passau by Arnulf after his expulsion, the Bavarian bishops complained to Rome that Viching, with the help of Svätopluk, had established a province in Sclavinia (Sedavia). See Notae de episcopis Pataviensibus: "Hic Laureacensem ecclesiam pressit, volens provinciam dividere et auxilio Zwentenwaldi regis Moavorum in Sedavia metropolim suscitare" (Havlík 2019, 264).

[3] As for the original texting: "[...] didicimuse (John VIII.) tuae (Svatopluk I.) devocionis sinceritatem et tocius populi tui desiderium, quod circa sedem apostolicam et nostram paternitatem habetis. Nam divina gracia inspirante, contemptis aliis saeculi huius principibus, beatum Petrum, apostolici ordinis principem vicariumque illius, habere patronum et in omnibus adiutorem ac defensorem pariter cum nobilibus viris fidelibus tuis et cum omni populo terrae tuae amore fidelissimo elegisti et usque ad finem sub ipsius et vicarii eius defensione colla summittens, pio affectu cupis, auxiliante Domino, utpote filius devotissimus permanere. Pro qua scilicet tanta fide ac devocione tua et populi tui apostolatus nostri ulnis extensis te quasi unicum filium amore ingenti amplectimur et cum omnibus fidelibus tuis paternitatis

The further political development of this part of Europe clearly shows that the papal patronage was the fount other dynasties between the Carpathians and the Danube would draw heavily from over the next period in order to defend their political position against the successors of the Carolingians, i.e. against the political aspirations of the Empire.

On the other hand, the secular counterpart to this Slavic ecclesiastical province was to be the *Regnum Sclavorum* subordinated to Rome – just as the idea of a Slavic province derived from the original idea of *Illyricum*. Therefore, the Kingdom of the Slavs ideologically followed the political tradition of the former Roman province of *Illyricum*. The establishment of this province, headed by its own *caesar*, was part of the political plan of Diocletian's Tetrarchy, that is, the four parts of his single Roman Empire. When in 884, Charles III the Fat († 888) made Svatopluk his personal vassal on Kumenberg by Tulln[4] (Panic 2000, 36), the *Imperium Christianum* consisted of four main provinces (kingdoms) as well: West Franconia, Lotharingia, East Franconia and Sclavonia. And this was precisely the model Emperor Otto III would eventually get back to when he tried to renew the great program of the Carolingians and – resuming the political program *Renovatio Imperii Romanorum* – acknowledged that it would consist of four equal Christian provinces – kingdoms: *Galia*, *Roma*, *Germania* and *Sclavinia* (Fried 2001, passim).

However, to get hold of the political heritage of the Roman *Illyricum* it was imperative to acquire Pannonia. Enough has been written about how this happened. Nevertheless, most historians seem to miss the key reason why this happened. As a matter of fact, not many people have considered the motive that led Svatopluk to take this step between 882 and 884. For it meant violating the almost ten-year-old Peace of Forchheim with the East Frankish king, Louis the German. In fact, Svatopluk attacked a territory that was clearly part of the (East Frankish) Empire. It was only thanks to Svatopluk's acute military and tactical skills and to the significant military superiority he enjoyed at the time that he got away with it in the end. Moreover, this territorial annexation was eventually validated by Emperor Charles III the Fat himself on Kumenberg near Tulln (*MMFH* 1, 97). But why did Svatopluk need to conquer Pannonia?

Ancient Pannonia was heavily burdened by its ancient cultural, religious and political association with the not so remote Roman Empire. Its capital, but also the original capital of the entire prefecture of *Illyricum*, was the legendary Sirmium (present-day Sriemska Mitrovica). This was the original seat of the *ceasar* (junior emperor), Galerius, who was compared to Hercules. Pannonia was also the place where the *Legio VI Herculia* had been stationed. Therefore, the strategy to legitimize the most prominent ruler of the Mojmirid family and dynasty – who had recently been accepted into the family of European rulers – needed to refer directly to the Roman tradition (Noble (ed.) 2006; Reimnitz 2015). After all, the originally illegitimate rulers of the Frankish Empire – the Carolingians and Charlemagne himself – did exactly the same when he was proclaimed emperor (*Imperator Augustus*) of the restored Roman Empire. Why else would he have coins minted, on which he was depicted in the style of the former Roman emperors? The fact that he chose Aachen as his headquarters – the very same place tradition has Gaius Julius Caesar staying at and enjoying the local spas – is no coincidence either. The reason for conquering Pannonia was, thus, the very same fact that led Rome's canonic lawyers to choose Sirmium as the seat of St. Methodius. There are many other indications that could shed light on the motives that led Svatopluk to undertake his most important southern campaign.

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nostrae gremio veluti oves domini nobis commissas recipimus vitaeque pabulo clementer nutrire optamus [...]" (Marsina, 1974, 23-24, No. 30).

[4]   Annales Fuldenses 2019, 98-99. Here, note 594 contains a fairly extensive political-symbolic analysis of this act. I am of the opinion that Charles III made Svatopluk his personal vassal elevating him above the other princes of the Empire and, thus, effectively recognized his royal rank.

The fact that the *Legio VI Herculia* had been headquartered in Pannonia was well known to Pribina and his son, Koceľ. As a matter of fact, it is no coincidence that the Pribinas dedicated their most impressive church to holy martyr Hadrian, an officer of the aforementioned *Legio VI*. By the way, Pope Hadrian II also took his name after this saint. The symbolic center of *Legio VI* was Herculia / Gorsium, present-day Tác, only 5 km away from Székesfehérvár (Alba Regia/ Stuhlweissenburg/Stoličný Belehrad) the city that would become the coronation site of the kings of Pannonia (later Kingdom of Hungary). The emblem the officers of this legion were allowed to wear on their shields was a black eagle in a red field. All these connections might or, rather, must have been known to Svatopluk as well. In fact, around 873, papal legates such as Paul, bishop of Ancona, and John, priest of Venice, are also known to have been in his court (Betti 2013, 160-161). Being knowledgeable of the old legal norms that could apply for Pannonia, they negotiated the separation of the Archdiocese of Pannonia from the Church of Salzburg and Passau. Last but certainly not least, by conquering Pannonia, Svatopluk's Kingdom of the Slavs came in immediate contact with the territories under the direct political influence of the papacy.[5]

Thus, in 884 Emperor Charles III the Fat formally validated the annexation of Pannonia and recognized Svatopluk as his personal vassal, an act the Roman bishops must have taken into consideration. It is in this context that Pope Stephen V (d. 891) calls Svatopluk I *rex Sclavorum* in the autumn of 885.[6]

To those who do not understand the symbolic code encrypted in the language used by the Diocese of Rome and tend to simplify, distort, or completely ignore its conceptual character, let me point out something that has long been well known, namely that the titles of rulers in the early Middle Ages cumulated the most important information about their holder. Each title consists of four main parts. The first is the personal proper name of the title holder, the second is the title or rank itself, the third is the name of the community the title relates to, and the fourth is the state of the grace of God of the title holder. Ildar Garipzanov, an expert on the language symbolism at the Carolingian courts, describes it as follows: "*Early medieval titles clearly express royal authority as the relationship that binds the ruler, his subjects, and God*" (Garipzanov 2008, 102). The period symbolic meaning of the address *rex Sclavorum* the Pope – the vicar of Christ on earth – uses to refer to Svatopluk, needs to be explained in present-day language. The holder of the title is Svatopluk I of the Mojmirid family. His unquestioned rank is *rex*, that is king. It is the second highest rank in the Christian Latin world after that of Emperor in the restored Roman Empire. This title, king, refers to an entity called *Sclavi* in Latin, that is Slavs in general. The third side of this relationship is God, which is why "king by the Grace of God" (*Dei gratia rex*) is usually added to the title of early medieval rulers (Havlík 1965, 116-122).

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[5]   The fact that Svatopluk I was held in high esteem by the papacy is not only evidenced by the formal way the popes addressed him, such as *unicus filius* ("only son") or *dilectus filius* ("beloved son"), but also by the fact that they assigned him certain diplomatic missions. For example, when he met Arnulf in 890 on Mount Omuntesperch (Amandsberg = Mount of St. Amand?) in Pannonia, Svatopluk – acting on behalf of the Pope – urged his brother-in-law to charge to Italy (Annales Fuldenses 2019, 100).

[6]   In his letter "*Quia te zelo...*" from 885, Pope Stephen V calls Svatopluk by the title "*rex Sclavorum.*" (Marsina 1974, 27-29, No. 35). The authenticity of this letter has never been questioned. Svatopluk's exceptional position in the system Charlemagne's late Frankish Empire was enhanced by the fact that he was the godfather of Arnulf's eldest son, who was named Svatopluk after him, but also by his marriage to a member of the Carolingians, Arnulf's sister, who is aptly known as Gizela by tradition. For more on this topic, See Ioannis Aventini Annales ducum Baioariae: "Suatebogus Gisalam sororem Arionulphi uxorem duxit, filium Arionulphi ex concubina genitum lustrali die arrogat." (Ioannis Aventini Annales ducum Baioariae 2019, 409.

Now let us have a look at the name Slavs – *Slöväni / Sloveni / словѣнє*. In my opinion, this term needs to be understood not only as the ancestors of present-day Slovaks and Moravians, but as all the subjects of Svatopluk without any further distinction. The denomination of the community the royal title of Svatopluk refers to – similar to the contemporary denominations of the other kings of the then Latin world – mostly represent a generalized abstract form of the current composition or structure of the entire population of the kingdom. In some respects, however, they certainly reflect the dominant position of some of its parts. Let me illustrate this in the example of the Latin title of the kings of East Franconia, namely *rex Francorum orientalium*. We know from other sources that the kings of East Franconia ruled not only over Franks, but over Bavarians, different Slavic tribes, Saxons and others as well.[7] Likewise, Svatopluk did not rule just people who called themselves Slavs. In fact, the people he ruled over in Pannonia, as well as in Moravia, the Principality of Nitra and Transdanubia, included Bavarians, Jews and descendants of the late Roman population. On the other hand, we cannot forget that present-day scholarship acknowledges the formative character of this type of abstract denominations of communities (Garipzanov 2008, 102). So, it is not so important that all the inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Slavs call themselves Slavs, but the fact that had this kingdom persisted, they might have one day come to call themselves so.

Svatopluk I – along with the ruler of the Bulgarians, Boris – must be considered the most influential ruler of 9th century East-Central Europe. Unlike Boris, however, Svatopluk's clear pro-Latin orientation remains unquestionable. The road to changing the original papal plan to restore its sovereignty over *Illyricum* – which this time is to be called Kingdom of the Slavs – opened again in the 880s. However, the powerful cultural and religious particularity of the Methodius Church and the various political particularities of the newly annexed territories and their centrifugal forces might have been hurdles on this road.

The sudden and radical change in the papacy's attitude towards this "anomaly" in the Western Church also contributed to Old-Church Slavonic being forbidden as a liturgical language. It personified in Pope Stephen V. This is the reason why, after the death of St. Methodius on 6 April 885, Svatopluk tried to get rid not only of this cultural and religious peculiarity, but also of all the disciples of St. Methodius, led by St. Gorazd. He assigned this task to Bishop Viching of Nitra, who was also put in charge of the Slavic Ecclesiastical Province. By appointing Viching – a Latin bishop – to the position of administrator of the Slavic ecclesiastical province, but not as its archbishop. On the other hand, Svatopluk by this act also disrupted the ecclesial particularity the Nitra diocese had enjoyed against archbishop St. Methodius since its establishment in 880.

After his coronation in Székesfehérvár (Stoličný Belehrad) in 885 by papal legate Cardinal Honorius(?) (Homza 2021b, 95-96), Svatopluk had only one issue to deal with: the archaic political particularities that had remained latent in his newly constituted *Regnum Sclavorum*. Centralizing the power of a dynasty in a culturally, religiously and politically heterogeneous environment may have many forms. The use of violence is the fastest, but not always the most effective. This time, Svatopluk's decision does not seem to have been well judged. The way the *Annals of Fulda* describe the brutality Svatopluk used against the elites of the Pannonian principality constitute enough evidence for this claim.[8] In fact, the inappropriate force Svatopluk used can also be seen in the fact that just two years after his death in 894, the leaders of the Czechs and Sorbs were already trying to get back to the bosom of the East Frankish Kingdom. Interestingly, these dangerous centrifugal forces from the annexed territories (Vistula, Pannonia, Bohemia, Sorb Lusatia, etc.)

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[7]   For example, Prince Rastislav is sentenced to death by the Franks, the Bavorians, as well as the Slavs (Annales Fuldenses 2019, 85).
[8]   Annales Fuldenses 2019, 98.

had not manifested themselves in any significant way while Svatopluk was still alive. This might have been because Svatopluk always managed to formalize his authority over the annexed territories politically and legally. Textbook examples of this are the treaties he concluded with the kings of East Franconia, Louis the German – Forchheim (874), Charles III the Fat – Kaumberg, Tulln (884) and Arnulf – Omuntesperch (890).

However, the unexpected death of Svatopluk in 894, the subsequent extinction of the Mojmirid family and the almost nine-decades-long interregnum on the mid-Danube, did not mean that Rome had forgot its plan to restore *Illyricum – Regnum Sclavorum* under the protection of St. Peter's successors. Around 1001, the Nitra – *Cisdanubia* – and the former Balaton – *Transdanubia* – principalities united to give origin to the Kingdom of Pannonia, which would eventually be known as the Kingdom of Hungary. How the Kingdom of Pannonia became the Kingdom of Hungary is a specific issue that needs to be considered elsewhere (Homza 2019, 7-35). Similarly, it will be necessary to consider up to what extent the concept of *Sclavinia* (Illyria/ Illiryum) – recognized by Rome – persisted as a parallel program among the ecclesiastical and secular elites between the Adriatic and the Carpathians in the 13th and following centuries.

Certainly, the new dynasties that emerged in East-Central Europe in the second half of the 9th century did not forget the political idea of the *Regnum Sclavorum* and Svatopluk as its protagonist. As a matter of fact, it is no coincidence that the ambitious Polish king Mieszko I († 992) named one of his sons Svatopluk. So did Vladimir the Great († 1015) of Old Rus' at about the same time. Neither did the Nitra Arpads forget Svatopluk. In fact, they concentrated all their political imagination in the legend that has King Svatopluk's sword buried in mount Zobor above Nitra (Homza 2013b, 68, 77 and 98). As is well known, it was from Nitra that Svatopluk set off to take possession of the central Moravian throne, and it was also from Nitra that he managed to unite the geopolitical territory between the Carpathians and the lower Danube under his rule when he occupied Pannonia. Nitra was then the center from which the princes and kings of Pannonia, Stephen I († 1038), Bela I († 1063), Gejza I († 1077) and Ladislaus I († 1095) would eventually unify these territories as well. Failing to emphasize the position Nitra – and, therefore, Slovaks – occupy in the Tradition of Svatopluk is, therefore, out of the question.

That being so, what should be the exact wording of the inscription on the pedestal of the statue of Svatopluk I at Bratislava Castle? As already indicated, the legitimacy of Svatopluk's rule was built on three basic pillars. First and most important is the fact that the Holy See took his *regnum* under its patronage, so Svatopluk was certainly a ruler *gratia Dei* – by the grace of God. Second to it is Svatopluk's formal loyalty towards the restored Roman Empire, which is best described by the Latin word *rex*. And third, his title refers to the political community of the Slavs. Svatopluk was, therefore, king of the Slavs by the grace of God. In Latin SVENTIBALDUS GRATIA DEI REX SCLAVORUM. This wording comprehends most of the symbolism Svatopluk I represents. In fact, it best reflects the internal power lines of his rule. It also adequately reconciles the distinct historical tradition of the Slovak nation and country and the significant position Svatopluk occupies in the history of Europe.

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